

Evidence links precarious employment and poor mental health

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A new paper co-authored by King's researchers finds that insecure work can deprive people not only of the financial benefits of secure employment but also the social benefits of regular routine, identity,

valued social status and positive social interactions.

The research is published in the journal *Work, Employment and Society*.

Co-authored by Dr. Annie Irvine from the Center for Society & Mental Health, the paper aims to synthesize evidence on how and why insecure employment poses mental health risks.

"Qualitative research is essential to understanding the complex and contingent relationships between employment status, [mental health](#) and broader social well-being, illuminating precisely how and why it is that precarious employment has negative implications for mental health," says Dr. Annie Irvine.

In a linked blog for [the Work Foundation's program of research on insecurity](#), Dr. Irvine stresses the importance of addressing temporal insecurity, and the mental health benefits of a more predictable guaranteed income:

"Universal basic income is a complex policy option, but this paper shows that there is growing evidence that such an approach may have positive impacts for workers' mental health," says Irvine.

"The impact of insecure work on [interpersonal relationships](#), both inside and outside of the workplace also has implications for workplace inclusion practices, particularly as marginalized groups are overrepresented among those in insecure work. More equitable and supportive workplace relations may counter feelings of social isolation and tendencies to suppress needs and concerns."

The paper focuses on insecure contractual forms, including temporary agency, fixed-term, casual, zero-hours and gig work. Of the participants in the 32 reviewed studies, it finds that several reported experiences of

stress, exhaustion, anxiety, depression and other emotions such as frustration, guilt and [low self-esteem](#).

It also finds that beyond offering living wages and the social protection of sick pay, workers' mental health may improve through more predictable working hours and better working relationships. Greater confidence in the regularity of hours could also counter [negative responses](#) to overwork and showing up to work without being productive.

More information: Annie Irvine et al, How Does Precarious Employment Affect Mental Health? A Scoping Review and Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Evidence from Western Economies, *Work, Employment and Society* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/09500170221128698](https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170221128698)

Provided by King's College London

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